

The President's Daily Brief

31 March 1972

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

On *Page 1*, we discuss the current Communist buildup in Vietnam.

The Chilean Government now appears ready to exploit the ITT story. (*Page 4*)

Soviets

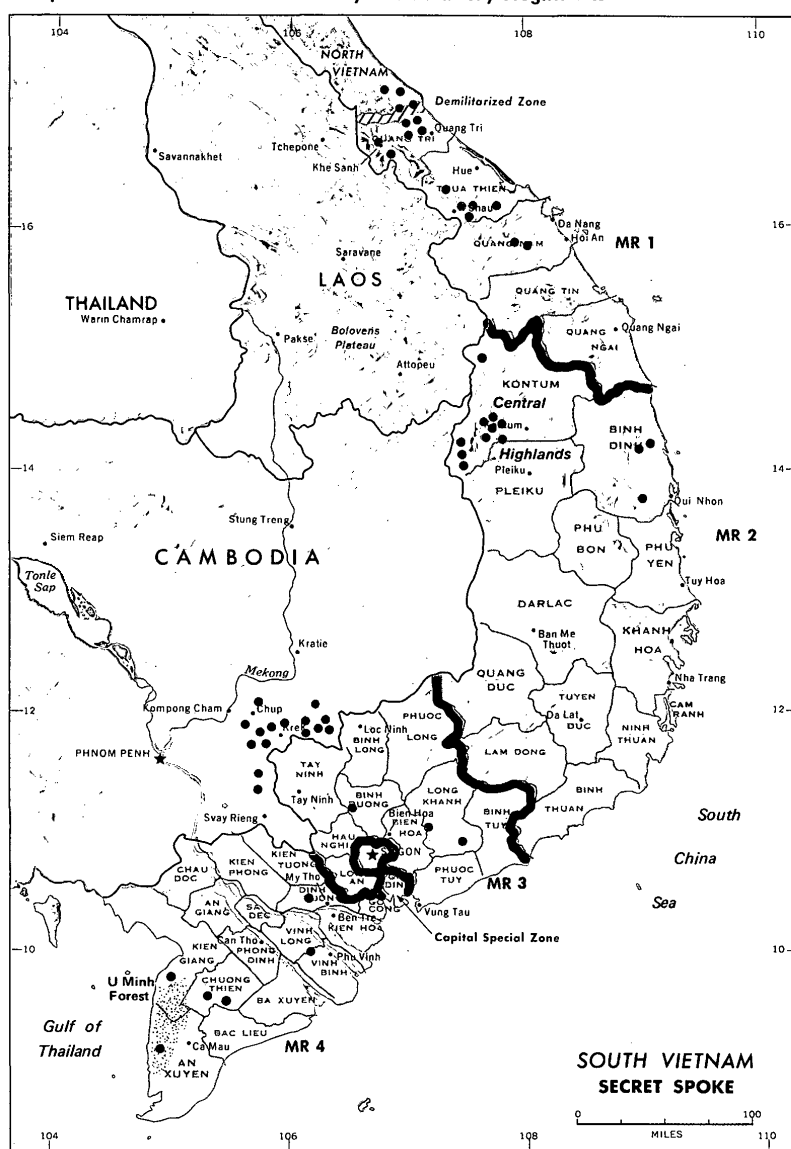
Chinese

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Disposition of Communist Infantry and Artillery Regiments



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VIETNAM

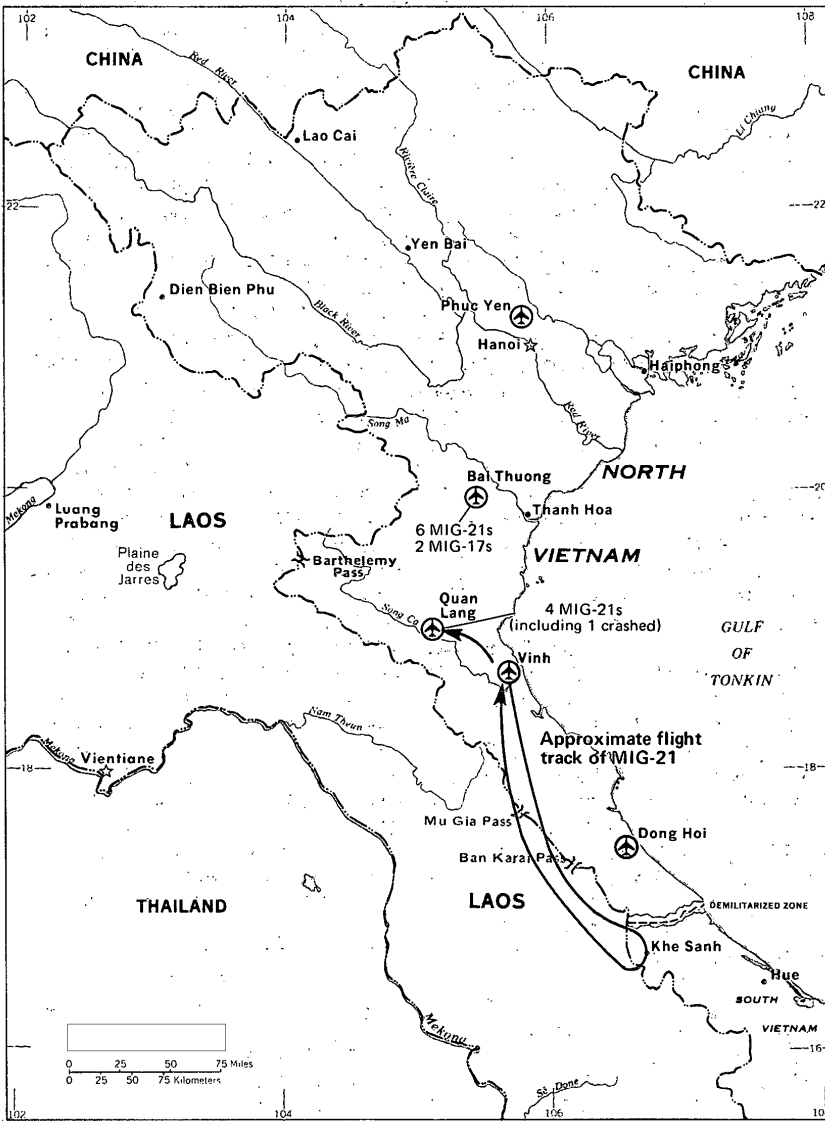
Communist forces have begun a new series of attacks along the DMZ following several weeks of heavy shelling. North Vietnamese artillery and infantry units on 30 March launched coordinated attacks against South Vietnamese bases in northeast Quang Tri Province. At least five artillery bases were shelled and another three were hit by ground assault. Initial reports indicate that damage and casualties were light, but the South Vietnamese were forced to abandon temporarily at least one position.

More ominous than these attacks is the increasing threat posed by the North Vietnamese buildup along the borders of each military region in South Vietnam. In the north, Hanoi's 324B Division has moved south through western Quang Tri and Thua Thien and is now located in the mountains west of Hue. At least one regiment of this division has been engaged by South Vietnamese forces, which claim to have won a victory in the initial encounters. Other 324B elements are in position to attack at any time. The 304th Division is straddling the DMZ and could also be committed with little warning. Part of one regiment has pushed into the Khe Sanh sector in western Quang Tri, and another regiment has moved across the DMZ farther east, threatening the Quang Tri provincial capital. In addition to these divisional forces, the enemy has five separate infantry regiments and four artillery regiments in the Quang Tri - Thua Thien region, bringing the main force threat there to some 15 regiments.

Well above the DMZ in North Vietnam, the 308th Division is still near the Ha Tinh - Quang Binh provincial border. It has not made any significant moves farther south in some weeks and there are no signs that it will do so soon. The other division in North Vietnam's strategic reserve, the 325th, apparently remains in the vicinity of Hanoi.

In MR-2, the enemy threat to the western highlands also continues to develop, and main force elements are in a position to attack at any time. During the past few days, radio direction finding has indicated that all of the enemy's traditional B-3 Front regiments plus the four regiments of the North Vietnamese 320th Division are now in Kontum and Pleiku provinces. The command authorities controlling these regiments have moved from Laos into Vietnamese territory. The enemy has ten regiments in the highlands, newly equipped with heavier artillery and antiaircraft weapons. Nearer the coast, the enemy has three regiments of the 3rd Division that are usually stationed there. Given the concentration

MIG Penetration of South Vietnam



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of Communist units in Kontum Province, the provincial capital of Kontum City still appears to be a primary target, although cities and government bases in both Kontum and Pleiku provinces could be hit.

Government forces defending the western highlands currently number some 12,000 men, but additional forces can be brought in from elsewhere in MR-2 and from Saigon's general reserves. Although government artillery in the highlands does not match the range and firepower of the Communists, the support received from strategic bombers and tactical fighters, together with the helicopter troop lift and gunship support, compensates for this.

Farther south, the Communists are continuing to move elements of the 5th, 7th, and 9th divisions now in Cambodia closer to the border of Tay Ninh Province. There are 15 regiments east of the Mekong, eight of which may be within 15 miles of South Vietnamese territory. In addition, the Communists have three infantry regiments and one artillery regiment well within MR-3, but these are all understrength.

Until recently in this dry season, the delta area has not been threatened by additional main forces. Three enemy regiments are scattered about MR-4 and three others have been largely confined to the U Minh Forest region. The latter are probably now under a newly identified division headquarters. Two additional Communist regiments and a divisional headquarters, called the Phuoc Long Front, have recently been detected in Cambodia moving south toward the border of Chau Doc Province. Elements of these units may have been responsible for recent artillery fire against South Vietnamese positions on the Cambodian side of the border, and they are probably close enough to attack the border areas of MR-4 at any time.

When major attacks are launched in northern South Vietnam, the Communists will be in a better position to provide fighter aircraft support than at any time in over two years. The flight of six MIG-21s from Phuc Yen to fields in the panhandle on 29-30 March brings MIG strength south of the 20th parallel to 12. Intercepts indicate that the Communists plan to use the MIGs in combat, and last evening one of the newly arrived aircraft overflew the Khe Sanh area in the first confirmed penetration by a MIG of South Vietnamese airspace.

(continued)

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The Communists' buildup clearly gives them the capability of attacking in strength along widely separate fronts, a tactic that could complicate the South Vietnamese task of reinforcing endangered positions. The heavy attacks already launched near the DMZ and in the highlands fall far short of enemy capabilities. The enemy has for some time had a substantial assault capability in the DMZ area and on the edge of the highlands but has delayed using this strength. Given these delays, there is no good indication how much of his strength the enemy ultimately will expend during this fighting season. But he now has enough main forces deployed to inflict considerable punishment on the South Vietnamese.

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NOTES

Chile: The government now appears ready to exploit the ITT story.

[REDACTED] Pres-
ident Allende plans to address a mass rally on 6 April in which he will protest plots "to oust and murder" him and try to link them to the reports of ITT maneuvering to prevent his assumption of office in 1970. As a further step, the Chilean congress intends to investigate the ITT issue.

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